The Qualitative Report 2013 Volume 18, Article 22, 1-23
http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/maxwell22.pdf

Case Study of Three Rural Texas Superintendents as Equity Oriented Change Agents

Gerri Marie Maxwell
Texas A&M University–Kingsville, Texas USA

Leslie Ann Locke
The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi USA

James Joseph Scheurich
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indiana USA

For this qualitative case study (Patton, 2003), we used narrative inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) and sought to analyze extended interviews and field notes based on interactions with three rural superintendents working in high-needs, public PK-12 school districts in Texas. We collected data with regard to these superintendents' perceptions of themselves as social justice/equity oriented change agents based on the Equity Oriented Change Agent or EOCA framework developed by Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009). Our goal with this study was to glean greater insight into the work of these rural school leaders as potential equity oriented change agents. Additionally, we sought to ascertain any additional EOCA characteristics through analysis of the participants' perceptions. The data revealed themes that aligned with the Skrla et al., (2009) framework as well as some emergent data beyond those EOCA characteristics. These themes afforded us a better understanding of the work of these three rural superintendents as equity oriented change agents and how they perceive their work. Key Words: Case Study, Equity, Rural Leadership

You must be the change you want to see in the world.
Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

Theoharris (2009) recently articulated the research problem addressed in this study when he noted that,

> While there is a small but growing body of social justice/equity oriented change agency/equity leadership literature, what is missing from this growing body of literature is a discussion and details of concrete models and real school leaders who live out a call to do social justice/equity oriented change agency/equity work (SJL) in public schools. (p. 9)

Thus, our objective for this research was to conduct a case study (Patton, 2003) using narrative inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) of three superintendents working in rural districts in Texas, each of whom have had leadership success in their high-needs, public PK-12 school districts. Additionally, we wanted to ascertain how these school

personnel lead successfully, while focused on equity for all students and working in challenging circumstances.

Research such as this has global significance in light of the fact that while there has been a steady expansion of the social justice/equity oriented change agency-oriented scholarship in educational leadership (Houston, Blankenstein, & Cole, 2010) little of it has been centered on *rural* social justice/equity oriented change agency/equity leadership. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that the "othering" of rural education has yielded omission and invisibility with regard to rural school leadership in the aforementioned social justice/equity oriented change agency and equity frameworks that forthrightly seek to avoid marginalization of any particular perspective. While this oversight is problematic, it is not surprising. According to Howley (1997), "Rural people in general – and also rural commitments, ideas, and practices – are [often] 'othered'" (p. 34). Thus, not only has there been a deficit of attention to rural social justice/equity oriented change agency/equity oriented leadership this very deficit may indicate an unconscious bias among social justice/equity oriented change agency-oriented scholars.

Thus, with an intended audience of school leaders and researchers who care about school leadership, this study offers insight into uncharted territory, that is how rural school leaders perceive their work and whether they perceive their work as social justice focused/equity oriented change agency as aligned to the Equity Oriented Change Agency (EOCA) framework proposed by Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009).

Theoretical Framework

Too little attention has been paid to the academic performance gaps between rural students and their suburban counterparts (Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997). These performance gaps are of concern because the number of students being taught in rural schools has increased from just over 9 million in 2007 to over 10 million students in 2009 (Johnson & Strange, 2009). Additionally, a recent report by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) (2011-2012) noted that in eight states, including Arizona, Tennessee, Texas, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, New Mexico, and Florida, rural school district enrollment grew by over 22 percent from academic years 1999–2000 through 2008–2009. This compares with a 1.7% increase in enrollment among all non-rural districts (USDE, 2012). Thus, these statistics support what Scheurich and Skrla (2003) have advocated; that is, providing equitable and excellent educational experiences for all students, regardless of whether these students are urban, suburban, or rural, is essential.

Moreover, the literature on school change has noted "exemplary leadership helps create the necessity for change" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 8). Furthermore, exemplary leadership makes the change happen (Fullan, 1993, 2001; Grogan, 2002a, 2002b; Theoharis, 2007). Theoharris (2009) asks these questions with regard to exemplary leadership:

> What does leadership that transforms schools into more equitable and just places, with an attention to climate and achievement, accomplish?
> How do leaders achieve the transformation?
> What knowledge, skills, and dispositions are required?
> What barriers do leaders encounter?
> How do leaders sustain themselves and their work in light of the barriers? (p. 9)

Further, Theoharris (2009) noted that, "a small but growing body of literature on social justice leadership has now emerged," (p. 9). He cited a number of those studies including special

academic journal issues (Grogan, 2002a, 2002b; Marshall, 2004; Normore, 2006; Shoho, 2006; Tillman, Brown, Campbell Jones, & Gonzalez, 2006) as well as numerous book chapters and other scholarship all serving as theoretical foundations for the notion of social justice leadership (Theoharris, 2009). Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) sought to take the construct of social justice one step further answering Theoharris' (2009) call for concrete models of "real school leaders who live out a call to do social justice work (SJL) in public schools" (p. 9) by creating a framework for "equity oriented change agents" (p. 70) or EOCA's. Those EOCA's being leaders who do social justice/equity oriented change agency/equity work in public schools. Skrla et al. (2009) describe EOCA's as persons who conduct their work through: (a) having an equity attitude, (b) avoiding demonizations, (c) initiating courageous conversations, (d) demonstrating persistence, (e) remaining committed but patient, (f) maintaining an asset attitude, and (g) maintaining a coherent focus.

In considering use of Skrla et al.'s (2009) framework as the lens for this study, a brief summary is provided in this section for each EOCA characteristic, but, references to the extant literature that assist in grounding the origin of these characteristics are provided as a means of the historical literature review on the origin of the characteristics that compose this EOCA construct. The resulting literature review led to a discovery of a void in the literature over the last decade with regard to articulation of change agency in any form with the exception of the Skrla et al. (2009) EOCA framework.

To understand what Skrla et al. (2009) are describing in the first characteristic that pertains to an EOCA "*having an equity attitude*," we refer back to the beginning of Skrla et al.'s (2009) book where they cited equity or educational equity as defined on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Web site:

> Education equity: the educational policies, practices and programs necessary to (a) eliminate educational barriers based on gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status; and (b) provide equal educational opportunities and ensure that historically underserved or underrepresented populations meet the same rigorous standards for academic performance expected of all children and youth. Educational equity knowledge and practices in public schools have evolved over time and require a comprehensive approach. Equity strategies are planned, systemic, and focus on the core of the teaching and learning process (curriculum, instruction, and school environment/culture). Educational equity activities promote the real possibility of equality of educational results for each student and between diverse groups of students.

Based on this definition, the explanation Skrla et al. (2009) provide for possessing an equity attitude focuses primarily on modeling the critical components described in this definition. That is, if an EOCA is going to effect change in others, then that EOCA must model the same behavior in their day-to-day interactions with colleagues who in turn will optimally model the same in their interactions with students. Ultimately, Skrla et al. (2009) state the EOCA must "treat everyone with respect, appreciation, and care – no exceptions"; however, they note that, "this does not mean that prejudice, bias, destructiveness, insensitivity, and so forth do not get addressed" (p. 71). The authors recommend courageous conversations to address such issues, and that construct of courageous conversations is a theme throughout the discussion of each EOCA characteristic.

Skrla et al. (2009) list, as a second characteristic, that an EOCA "*avoids demonizations*" (p. 71). What the authors mean by this term "demonization" is that an EOCA should not totalitize a person solely by a particular negatively defining characteristic. Not viewing

colleagues in a singular way requires the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty as described by other researchers on change agency (Dulewicz & Herbert, 2000; Howell & Higgins, 1990). Skrla et al. (2009) again cite the need for courageous conversations with other colleagues who might demonize their peers. These conversations are necessary so that little by little the organizational norms change and move toward equitable acceptance of different perspectives.

As discussed in each of these preceding characteristics, Skrla et al. (2009) mention the need for courageous conversations. In the third characteristic of an EOCA, the authors state that a defining characteristic of an EOCA is one whom is willing to initiate "*courageous conversations*" (p. 72). Skrla et al. (2009) provide the research literature by Singleton and Linton (2006) with regard to conducting during courageous conversations. As listed in the summary chart below, an EOCA who conducts courageous conversations: "engages the unwilling, sustains even in the face of discomfort, and deepens the conversation until 'authentic and meaningful actions occur'" (p. 16). While the authors provide more elaboration on the topic of courageous conversations, generally EOCA's who are willing to conduct these interactions accept the risk of "being open with others, even others we do not like" in the interest of creating more equitable environments for all adults and children in schools (p. 75). Conducting courageous conversations is risky business supported by previous researchers such as Dulewicz and Herbert (2000) who note effective change agents are risk-takers who are capable of coping with change and uncertainty while promoting innovation. Likewise, Howell and Higgins (1990) coin *outspokenness* as characteristic of change agency. While stated in different ways, conducting courageous conversations certainly is challenging but an EOCA who is willing to be outspoken while maintaining that "respect, appreciation, and care" for all with whom they interact, can successfully conduct courageous conversations.

It seems obvious that being an EOCA requires persistence based on the difficulty of implementing the first three characteristics. Having an equity attitude, avoiding demonizations, and initiating courageous conversations are no doubt easier said than done and require persistence. Indeed, *persistence* is the fourth characteristic described by Skrla et al. (2009). The gist of this characteristic is that an EOCA must persist in the face of embedded inequities in our work places and our schools. Many behaviors that are inequitable are institutionalized and require continuous effort to change them. Other researchers on change agency have noted that similar characteristics that complement persistence include "personal drive" (Kilpatrick & Locke, 1991) and "powerful, strategic vision" (Howell & Higgins, 1990). Additionally, Senge (2001) suggested that the "attributes of change leadership within 'learning organizations' be concerned with the capacity to sustain change that brings forth new realities" (p. 2). That capacity of which Senge speaks requires persistence.

Skrla et al. (2009) state, "Standing right next to persistence is patience" (p. 76). The authors' discussion of this EOCA characteristic notes that there is a keen balance between persistence, urgency, and patience. The authors advocate that the solution is "paying attention" (p. 76). In addition to paying attention, the authors suggest being an EOCA means being in it for the "long haul" (p. 76), which requires great patience. In considering this characteristic in relation to the extant change agency literature, Burgoyne (1990) suggested that change agency requires "overarching competencies associated with 'learning, changing, adapting, forecasting, anticipating, and creating change'" (p. 23). Thus, Burgoyne acknowledges that change agency requires the ability to balance many aspects of the role.

The sixth characteristic Skrla et al. (2009) provides leans toward possessing an *assets attitude* as a necessary characteristic of an EOCA. Skrla et al. (2009) state, "if you are going to work on change in a classroom, a school, or a district, it is best to start with the assets that are already in place" (p. 77). The primary literature upon which this characteristic is based is

the seminal work of Luis Moll and associates (1992) that focused on *funds of knowledge* students bring to school. An assets framework is stressed rather than a deficit framework (Valencia, 1997).

Concluding the EOCA list of characteristics is the need for *coherent focus* (Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 1994). Logically, this characteristic is provided at the end of the Skrla et al. (2009) list. Very simply, Skrla et al. (2009) cite Sonny Donaldson, former superintendent of Aldine, Texas who frequently told them, "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing" (p. 78). Other researchers who came before noted similar focus with characteristics related to vision (Howell & Higgins, 1990) and Senge (2001) who noted that the "attributes of change leadership within 'learning organizations' are concerned with the capacity to sustain change that brings forth new realities" (p. 2). It is only with a coherent focus that vision and new realities and new ways of doing school can ultimately emerge to support equitable environments. In support of this previous discussion, Figure 1 below provides a bulleted overview summary of the seven characteristics of an EOCA (Skrla et al., 2009).

Figure 1. Summary Characteristics of an Equity Oriented Change Agent

Summary Characteristics Of An Equity Oriented Change Agent (Skrla et al., 2009)

Demonstrates an Equity Attitude:
- Models equity towards colleagues in order to enable equity behavior between educators and students.
- Models treating others with respect, appreciation and care.
- Conducts courageous conversations when needed to address "prejudice, bias, destructiveness, insensitivity".
- Conducts courageous conversations with respect, admiration, and care.

Avoids Demonizations:
- Does not characterize the entire person by a single negative characteristic.
- Models not demonizing to colleagues.
- Conducts courageous conversations as needed to address to address negative behaviors such as negative treatment of students.

Initiates Courageous Conversations:
- "Engages, sustains, deepens" the unwilling to talk, the uncomfortable talk, and the authentic talk.
- Commits to "stay engaged, speak your truth, experience discomfort, and expect and accept non-closure."
- Forgives her/his own failed attempts; is willing to apologize; acknowledges her/his own weaknesses, and remains persistent in efforts to converse courageously.

Demonstrates Persistence:
- Models "constant focus, repeated effort, and endurance."
- Understands inequity is embedded, institutionalized and requires hard work that takes time.

Remains Committed but Patient
- Avoids showing impatience which can be viewed as disrespect.
- Understands there will be ambiguity in perspectives about pacing change.
- Understands and models that paying attention is a good way to navigate pace of change.
- Models patience toward colleagues and patience toward self.

Maintains an Asset Attitude
- Focuses on "funds of knowledge" students bring from their families, neighborhoods, and cultures.
- Starts with the assets that are in place and build up from there.
- Models recognition of and valuing of a person's assets.
- Value her/his own assets.

Maintains a Coherent Focus
- "Keeps the main thing the main thing."
- Maintains focus over time (and realizes it will take time!); doesn't switch focus from week to week.

In conclusion, this brief discussion elaborating the EOCA characteristics proposed by Skrla et al. (2009), in conjunction with various references to some of the previous literature on change agency, collectively were used as a framework to analyze our conversations with the participants with regard to considering them as EOCA's.

Purpose of the Study

Our goal for this study was to illuminate the voice and perspective of three rural superintendents from Texas. Furthermore, based on our initial research and work with these three districts, we considered whether these participants were indeed EOCA's when compared to the characteristics of an EOCA as defined by Skrla et al. (2009). Moreover, the purpose of the study was to glean greater insight into the work of these school leaders and their potential perceptions of themselves as EOCA's. Additionally, we sought to ascertain any additional EOCA characteristics through analysis of the participants' perceptions. Finally, in keeping with the qualitative tradition of emergent data (Stake, 1995), we also felt it necessary to entertain the possibility that the data would question any of the EOCA characteristics as defined by Skrla et al. (2009) and/or that other completely unexpected data may emerge that would enrich the study.

Role of the Researchers

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument**.** The qualitative research model believes that the researcher is an important part of the process of any qualitative research study (Patton, 2003). As a researcher, there are no clear-cut rules for how to do ethical, credible, high quality analysis (Patton, 1990). Thus researcher bias must be addressed through attempts at trustworthiness and credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985), in terms of understanding triangulation to establish trustworthiness and credibility, said

> It's as though a fisherman were to use multiple nets, each of which had a complement of holes, but placed together so that the holes in one net were covered by intact portions of other nets. (p. 306)

Mathison (1988) put it another way saying,

> Triangulation has risen an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation to control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology. (p. 13)

In this study, the lead author spent extended periods of time in the district contexts prior to the formal research period. The lead author worked as curriculum director, assistant superintendent, and external consultant managing various grants for the districts involved. Beyond formal employment, the lead researcher retains collegial professional relationships with each of the study participants. In addition to this time in the field, the lead author conducted formal interviews as outlined in the Methodology section. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that spending enough time in the research context is essential to qualitative research. Finally, formal university Internal Review Board approval was secured and renewed as the research extended beyond the period of one year.

Population and Description of the Study

Overview

The lead author purposefully identified three participants for this inquiry as potential EOCAs (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009), among other multiple affiliations with participants in similar positions, based on her time in the context in each of these three schools. The lead researcher, utilizing what Cole and Knowles (2001) refer to as the topic coming to the researcher, selected these participants who in her experience exhibited evidence that would potentially contribute to the study. A total of three participants were identified, each of whom at the time of data collection, worked in a high-needs, formerly underperforming, diverse school district in rural Texas. Each district was similar in size, having less than two thousand students in the entire PK-12 district. Additionally, each district served a population of students reporting a 65% or greater level of economic duress. Finally, in each district, at least 50% of their student enrollment was from traditionally marginalized groups. In an effort to maintain anonymity inasmuch as possible, detailed descriptions of the districts are not included due to considerable media coverage and concerns regarding maintaining confidentiality of the participants.

One of the districts in this study had been low-performing for so long that surrounding school districts began to try to poach White, higher performing students from the district.[1] Not surprisingly, this led to much inter-community conflict, statewide newspaper coverage, and legal action ultimately resulting in allowing the surrounding district to transfer students out legally. However, the impact on the community due to the conflict remained.

One town in one of the study districts received notoriety for its undeserved reputation (according to court findings) as a "toxic town."[2] This reputation stemmed from lawsuits by former employees of a nearby railroad company and a railroad tie manufacturing plant. The plaintiffs accused that arsenic, dioxins, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons produced by the plant were creating a higher than average occurrence of cancer among the residents of the community. The publicity of that lawsuit and closing of the manufacturing plant drove the enrollment of the district down by 40% from 2002 to 2009 (Texas Education Agency Snapshot).

Another district included in the study survived a complete change in administration, including all principals and the superintendent, over a six-month period. All of the former administration and other key staff left the district in 2000. The participant/superintendent interviewed from this district served in that role from 2001 to 2006.

Participants

The first participant, Mr. Guzman, is an early-career superintendent who is of Hispanic descent. At the time of data collection, he was in the fifth year of his first superintendency in the district. The second participant, Mr. Tyler, is a White, middle-aged superintendent. At the time of data collection he was his fifth superintendency. The third participant, Dr. Bryan, is a White, female, middle-aged superintendent, who at the time of data collection, was in the third year of her first superintendency.

These three superintendents either currently work or worked with three, small, rural, highly diverse schools with similarly serious achievement problems. One of the participants is

[1] Citation omitted to preserve anonymity of the participants.

[2] Citation omitted to preserve anonymity of the participants.

a sitting superintendent, while one retired this year in 2011, and the third participant most recently worked in the third district from 2001-2006.

These three superintendents chose to take positions in volatile and challenging low-performing districts. For one participant, the position came as an internal promotion. For each of the other participants, they sought these positions. At least one of the participants shared interview data with regard to some naïveté in accepting the position and not having fully understood the challenges that lay before him. Decisions to take these positions compelled us to find out more and consider responses from their interviews as they aligned, contributed, or even potentially disconnected with the seven EOCA characteristics articulated by Skrla et al. (2009).

We want to emphasize this is a story not about the struggles of these schools in Texas, but rather it is the story of who these people are as superintendents in their respective school districts and who they are as EOCA's as framed by the definition articulated by Skrla et al. (2009). We were ultimately interested to learn from the perspectives of these superintendents as to how they were able to successfully rewrite the ending (DuPlessis, 1985) for each of their respective school districts thus addressing Theoharris' (2009) call in the literature for real school leaders who "live out a call to do social justice/equity oriented change agency work in public school" (p. 9).

Methodology

Our object for this study was not only to share the voice of the EOCA's, but also to illuminate their stories within this EOCA framework according to Skrla et al. (2009), and perhaps add characteristics to the list, or question characteristics on the list, through the emergent nature of the qualitative research tradition (Stake, 1995).

Research Design and Sampling Strategy

Prior knowledge of the successful turnaround efforts of each of these three schools was the impetus to conduct this qualitative case study. Case study was employed as the unit of analysis and the cases were determined through purposeful sampling (Erlandson et al., 1993; Patton, 2003). Patton (2003) explained why case studies are utilized in qualitative research.

> The case study approach to qualitative analysis constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; in that sense it represents an analysis process. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest (Patton, 2003. (p. 447).

Three superintendents were purposefully selected (Erlandson et al., 2006) and interviewed. These participants were selected based on previous research conducted within the districts. During the previous research, some participants repeatedly suggested that these persons were integral to the successful reform of their district. Thus, a purposeful selection process supported the desired triangulation and trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Procedures

Data process. Data analysis began with the first interview and continued through the study (Stake, 1995). Initial hour-long interviews as well as follow-up interviews were conducted using a semi-structured, ten question protocol (see Appendix A to view the interview protocol) designed to serve as a springboard to encourage dialogue (Bernard, 2002).

Conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcribed text was then placed into excel format and coded twice. First, responses were analyzed for key words and general themes across the three respondents' data (Reissman, 1993). Then, the responses were analyzed for correlation to the EOCA characteristics by coding the data by key words from those themes inasmuch as possible. We attempted to draw connections between the participants' perspectives and the characteristics outlined in the EOCA framework. That is, we sought to analyze participant responses by comparing and contrasting them similarly using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to the seven characteristics Skrla et al. (2009) provided.

Emergent data. Additionally, as is the nature of qualitative research, emergent data could require us at any point in the study to rethink or think in a new way about what we were hearing. Bruner (2002) said, "great narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving" (p. 20). Additionally, we almost expected to uncover the unexpected as a means of triangulating the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) said that

> if the investigator produces field notes and makes interpretations that are continuously predictable from the original formulation, then that investigator has either not spent enough time on site or has persisted against all logic in his or her ethnocentric posture. (p. 302)

It is in the uncovering of the unanticipated, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe above, that the "truth," or the real story, is told.

Trustworthiness and credibility. We established trustworthiness and credibility through seeking evidence of themes across the three interviews as well as entertaining the possibility of the emergence of unexpected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We analyzed the data using Reissman's (1993) methodology, looking for themes across the data that would either parallel the characteristics Skrla and colleagues (2009) had provided, contribute additional characteristics to their list, or even potentially question characteristics on their list as evidenced by these three particular cases. In the course of the analysis of our conversations with three different superintendents who had three different backgrounds, we found commonalities in their responses in spite of the fact that their experiences varied. Having similar themes emerge across this diversity of participants contributed to the trustworthiness and credibility of the data. Additionally, we conducted member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) throughout the interviews. Continuous member checking contributed to the trustworthiness of the data. Finally, we conducted post-interview member checks with each participant to confirm our interpretation of the data.

Results

The data presented below is organized first through sharing the contextual knowledge participants had around the topic of equity. Following those results, the respondent data is presented as aligned to the seven EOCA characteristics (Skrla et al., 2009). Finally, as our conversations with the participants yielded several potentially new EOCA characteristics, those data are presented as well.

Equity Defined

One of the first questions asked of each participant was to define equity. The only female participant, Dr. Bryan, defined equity as:

> I think equity is fairness. Fair to all no matter what your abilities are. No matter what your color. What your age. Now, I'm more interested in age! Haha!

Mr. Tyler, the middle aged superintendent, said equity means "providing the prospect of the opportunity or success for all students and that picture might look different from one student to another or for different groups of students."

Finally, Mr. Guzman, the youngest superintendent stated,

> Equity ….meeting the needs of the students individually. They don't all need the same thing at the same time. Ummmm. Some need more; some need less. Some need different.

Clearly, these superintendents were attuned to the construct of equity. In our opinion, the working definitions and perceptions provided by the participants afforded continuance of each interview without further need for consensus building on the topic of equity.

EOCA Framework Alignment

Of the three superintendents interviewed, all of them shared comments that when analyzed, reflected or aligned with a majority of the EOCA characteristics as proposed by Skrla et al. (2009). None of the superintendents provided responses aligning with all seven. However, all seven EOCA characteristics were evidenced multiple times. Below are comments from the participants that exemplify each EOCA characteristic.

Demonstrates an equity attitude. In our analysis of participant comments, at least twenty of the responses were coded as reflective of an equity attitude according to the Skrla et al. (2009) rubric. Respondents who demonstrated an equity attitude, "model treating others with respect, admiration, and care" and model equity towards colleagues (p. 70). While all three participants provided responses evidencing an equity attitude, responses from the two male participants stand out. For example, responses from Mr. Guzman, the young superintendent, provided us with a preponderance of evidence that aligned with an equity attitude. Statements he made included constant references to dealing with people on an individual basis and making up his own mind about their motivations and behaviors rather than relying on comments from others. For example, he said:

> When I took the job, I started talking to people. One person at a time…teachers, principals, custodians. The longer and the more I was here, people started telling me about other people. The board was telling me or the outgoing superintendent would say that the first thing the board is going to tell you is to fire the maintenance director. I went down the list of teachers. Some was true. Some wasn't.

Mr. Guzman also said:

> I tried as a principal to deal with people individually, be consistent, be fair, be a resource for my teachers and be visible.

This participant also said his expectations for staff are that:

> They understand their population. Who their kids are. What their kids are. Who their families are. What the community is or isn't. Ummm. Understand the data. In the very end, it is to know the students and promote that the staff knows who they are, that they really look at the child beyond what's on paper. Paying attention, …listening.

Mr. Tyler shared the following when asked what he thought were the characteristics of an equity oriented change agent:

> One characteristic would be a person who is brave because when you want to achieve equity where you do not perceive it is present, you take on certain set patterns or certain mindsets that are there that are not allowing for equity.

For both Mr. Guzman and Mr. Tyler, the enormity of their challenges was evident both in tone and the demeanor in which they provided those responses. Their words and body language evidenced their commitment to an equity attitude.

Avoids demonizations. Throughout the interviews, while the responses were unique, themes were evident that related to the EOCA rubric including the characteristics of avoiding demonizations. Surprisingly however, the manner in which this non-demonizing surfaced in interviews was distinctly different as expressed by each of the participants. For example, Dr. Bryan, stated:

> I believe it's been very difficult here because, and not that they have to be, but not everyone in the community is equitable to everyone and then it's difficult when they come into an organization where we are trying to do that and ...Their perspective is just different.

While stakeholder perspectives are often challenges to equity as mentioned by Dr. Bryan sometimes internal EOCA's provide challenges to the formal leadership whom may or may not consider themselves EOCA's initially. Mr. Tyler, who is an EOCA in this study, was probably not an EOCA when he took the job in a small, rural district where he and the lead author both worked for a five-year period. Over this five-year period, Mr. Tyler was often near anger over some of the ideas shared. Mr. Tyler said of the lead author:

> With your guidance, we did some things like afterschool and in the past, I would have thought, oh well, that's the parents' responsibility, but being in Bird ISD, really opened my eyes to that there are equity issues and you do need to be aware of those. I think I am continually learning about equity and learning situations that did need change.

Mr. Tyler also said of the lead author:

> You would be my best example of a change agent. Now some of the ways you did some things… you tried to blur a few corners.

In addition to Dr. Bryan and Mr. Tyler, Mr. Guzman shared that he learned not to demonize his colleagues even when he disagreed with them. For example, he did not demonize his former supervisor, but chose to learn from him what he could. In fact, when the lead author worked in a central office role with Mr. Guzman, he commented more than once,

> I learned more from my bad bosses than I did from my good ones.

Mr. Guzman said of this previous supervisor:

> He could be a bully to some but he never bothered me. I did my job. And, I did it well. And, ultimately, it reflected back on him.

This participant also provided some information about his equity orientation in working with alternative placement students and how that influenced his philosophy in working with adults. Mr. Guzman said:

> I deal with them as human beings. Dealing with them individually. Mutual respect. Ummm… clearly defined rules making them understand that life and their education is all about choices. And with every choice there is a good and bad consequence. If they understand they are in control of this, then they can make better decisions, and not holding those things against them long term. Took one day at a time. If a kid has a bad day today, so be it, sometimes things got ugly and sometimes the consequences were severe. But there was new opportunity the next day to start again.

This participant noted that not totalitizing the student based upon one mistake was a philosophy that transcended his work at the next level in working with adults as an administrator.

In review, each of these participants provided a unique perspective while still remaining aligned with the Skrla et al. (2009) characteristic suggesting that an EOCA does not demonize colleagues and professional acquaintances.

Initiates courageous conversations. While considering the next EOCA characteristic with regard to participants evidencing willingness to initiate courageous conversations, we coded the responses such that when thematized generally insisted that an EOCA is not only courageous in conducting conversations, but generally that an EOCA needs to be courageous. For example, Mr. Guzman stated:

> I told the board what's wrong and ultimately it benefitted me. The previous administration irresponsibly would not say what it was. To me, if it's red, it's red. If it's purple, it's purple. A lot of districts put what they are successful at out front, sometimes to hide the other stuff and I didn't want to hide the other stuff.

Mr. Tyler suggested:

> When you want to be a change agent, or you are a change agent, you have to tackle some of those entrenched positions and that is one of the hardest things to do in our country when you have a system like public education. You have to be brave and you have to not be afraid to take on things. It helps when you have a team of people who maybe even have different backgrounds or personality traits. One of these might be the out of the box thinker that comes up with all of these things that might get us toward equity and another person might be like how far can we go this year.

This same participant said of the lead researcher:

> I have worked with a number of change agents, but you probably were the most FEARLESS.

As researchers, we know schools and districts need to be pushed constantly and leaders must persevere to help make positive changes. That persistence is the next EOCA characteristic.

Demonstrates persistence. In further consideration of the notion of persistence, Mr. Tyler said:

> In one district I worked which is the one where [the lead author] and I were there at the same time was a district a little out of the mold from where I previously worked so far as the demographics. I think the records will show that we were able to move that school from a lower level of success to a much higher level of success with much effort and sometimes angst, but we did do some really good things and several factors went into that including a very supportive staff and administrative staff.

Mr. Tyler's reference to much effort and angst reveals perseverance and his acknowledgement of this perseverance as necessary to the change process. He also said the following that acknowledges his understanding that perseverance pushes progress along:

> I would say that you (referring to the researcher) were the big change agent. I was there at a time when you were there and I don't see us progressing as fast or as well without a big change agent like you.

Mr. Guzman also acknowledged the need for perseverance when he said:

> We were able to push some things. Why was change necessary? Because the high school campus hit bottom. We all had a stake in it. The media loves to label and then that label is hard to shake. So we were able to make some significant positive changes.

This superintendent evidenced perseverance in difficult circumstances. Skrla et al. (2009) note, "standing right next to perseverance is patience" (p. 76).

Remains committed but patient. An overriding theme in the comments from Mr. Tyler was patience and prudence along with remaining committed to see the work through. Some of Mr. Tyler's comments include:

> You need characteristics of judgment on how fast a school and a community can progress towards equity. You may have the best idea in the world, but you have to have the ability to sell others on the team. I've been in many districts where an idea is announced at the top and then it doesn't work because it wasn't sold to the staff. Thus, you have to bring your staff along and remain patient in the process.

In addition to Mr. Tyler's comments, the other superintendents also revealed the notion of remaining committed but patient. For example, Mr. Guzman said:

> There is so much more we can do from academics to cleaner schools, newer schools. I'll feel like we've had success for a while, but then…. there is just always more to do.

Dr. Bryan said:

> We've made a lot of progress here in Eagle ISD, even though our high school is currently unacceptable just this past year, we're making necessary changes. Don't be surprised if we're not exemplary next year!

Each of these participants, in their own way, revealed through their words a stalwart commitment combined with persistent patience.

Maintains an asset attitude. While this characteristic is very similar to others such as an EOCA possessing an equity attitude, this characteristic truly focuses on acknowledging the assets of students and adults. Each participant interviewed shared this critical attribute. Dr. Bryan stated:

> I think it's the people who make schools successful. I think it's the teachers and the leadership and the way they handle situations and the way that they build relationships and teach the children.

Mr. Tyler's thoughts were very similar on this topic. He said:

> I think the thing that probably makes schools successful is to have a strong teaching staff that cares about students. You want a staff that's open to developing themselves professionally and open to accepting new ideas but yet being very prudent and drawing on their own experience.

Mr. Guzman said:

> It's important to get the best employees you can find. From food service to custodial to maintenance. People who take pride in their work and intend to do a good job. People who want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

Mr. Guzman continued:

> You can't pigeon-hole adults. You need to empower people and get out of their way. Give them the opportunity to be risk-takers. To take chances. To think for themselves. They need to grow as well. You can't stifle adults.

When asked what Mr. Guzman considered his greatest attribute, he said it was his "people skills." No doubt that is obvious by his statements above.

Maintains a coherent focus. Each participant provided data aligned with maintaining a coherent focus. For example, Mr. Guzman shared his success in a smaller school context where communication was facilitated and the small environment was an attribute to maintaining a coherent focus. He said:

> I had it well at the 9th grade center because it was small. I didn't have to share my teachers and my kids. They were in close proximity to each other on two floors.

With regard to Mr. Guzman's work in an alternative education setting, he said:

> We did work together and were successful with the most difficult kids. We were a learning community in my teaching situation. We shared what was successful. Lots of communication. We were small. It was critical to our success to work together because of our clientele. I used to say we were the best kept secret in East ISD.

In concluding this section, two other comments from participants are shared that reveal the ability to maintain a coherent focus that is integral for EOCA's. Mr. Tyler noted of the lead author:

> Some people like you (referring to the lead researcher) have the ability to step back and look at things more objectively than others. There were principals in Bird ISD that were equity-minded to a point but they were not as aware at the time. You had that focus and drive and vision.

The lead author appreciated all of these comments Mr. Tyler shared throughout the interview as aligned to the topic of change agency.

Finally, one of our favorite comments came from Dr. Bryan who, throughout the interviews, repeatedly made statements that cut to the heart of the work. She said of her challenges: "That's where the kids come in. As long as you focus on them, things seem to be fine." Obviously Dr. Bryan, "keeps the main thing, the main thing."

In conclusion of this section and for ease of review, Figure 3 provides a summary of most of the participant responses by theme.

EOCA Characteristic	#1	#2	#3	Example
Equity attitude	X	X	X	• Equity ….meeting the needs of the students individually. They don't all need the same thing at the same time. Ummmm. Some need more; some need less. Some need different. (1) • You need staff that understand their population. Who their kids are. What their kids are. Who their families are. What the community is or isn't. Ummm. Understanding the data. IN the very end, it is to know the students and promote that the staff knows who they are, that they really look at the child beyond what's on paper. (1) • I would define equity as this: providing the prospect of the opportunity or success for all students and that picture might look different from one student to another or for different groups of students. (2) • I think equity is fairness. Fair to all no matter what your abilities are. No matter what your color. What your age. Now, I'm more interested in age! Haha! (3) • I just hope that all public schools are very equitable, you know, that's what we are all about in public schools. If you want something that is not equitable, then you find a private school but this (public school) is for everyone. (3)
Avoids demonization	X	X	X	• When I was first hired, I started talking to people…one person at a time…teachers, principals, custodians, the longer and the more I was here, people started telling me about other people. The board was telling me or the outgoing superintendent would say that the first thing the board is going to tell you is to fire

				the maintenance director. I went down the list of teachers. Some was true. Some wasn't. (1) • I worked with kids in an alternative education program. If a kid had a bad day today, so be it. Sometimes things got ugly and sometimes the consequences were severe. But, there was a new opportunity the next day to start again. I think my work with these kids transcended into the same approach in working with adults. (1) • I had a previous supervisor. He was a good role model for me. He would tell me how he would make a decision and then when it's over, he would say, "either your decision is better or mine" and then there is learning involved in both. His expectation was I will give you as much rope as you want. Just don't make the same poor decision again. (1) • You (referring to lead researcher) would be my best example of a change agent. Now some of the ways you did some things….you tried to blur a few corners. But even though we often had different perspectives, I think we worked well together. You were the out of the box thinker. I was the prudent one. (2) • I believe it's been very difficult here because (and not that they have to be) but not everyone in the community is equitable to everyone and then it's difficult when they come into an organization where we are trying to do that and….their perspective is just….different. (3)
Initiates courageous conversations	X	X		• I told the board what's wrong and ultimately it's benefitted me. The previous administration to be safe or irresponsibly would not say what it was. I said if it's red, it's red. If it's purple, it's purple. (1) • Sometimes districts put what they are successful out front sometimes to hide the other stuff. I didn't want to hide the other stuff. (1) • When you want to be a change agent, or you are a change agent, you have to tackle some of those entrenched positions and that is one of the hardest things to do in our country when you have a system like public education. You have to be brave and not be afraid to take on things. It helps when you have this out of the box thinker (referring to lead researcher). You are my best example of a change agent. I've worked with others, but you were the most FEARLESS. (2)
Demonstrates persistence	X	X		• We were able to push some things. Why is change necessary? Because the high school campus hit bottom. We all had a stake in it. The media love to label and then that label is hard to shake. So we were able to make some significant positive changes. (1) • I would say that you (referring to the lead researcher) were the big change agent. I was there at a time when you were there and I don't see us progressing as fast or as well without a big change agent like you. (2) • In one district I worked in which is the one where you and I were there at the same time was a district a little out of the mold from where I previously worked so far as the demographics. I think the records will show that we were able to move that school from a lower level of success to a much higher level of success with much effort and sometimes angst, but we did do some really good things and several factors went into that including a very supportive staff and administrative staff. (3)
Remains committed but patient	X	X	X	• There is so much more we can do from academics to cleaner schools, newer schools. I'll feel like we've had success for a

				while, but then….there is just always more to do. (1) • You have to bring your staff along. You have to sell people on things. So, uhhhh, characteristics of judgment on how fast a school and community can progress toward equity and changes and the braveness and yet not being afraid to take on interest groups whether it be a staff or board or community. (2) • We've made a lot of progress here in Eagle ISD, even though our high school is currently unacceptable just this past year, we're making necessary changes. Don't be surprised if we're not exemplary next year! (3)
Maintains an asset attitude	X	X	X	• It's important to get the best employees you can find. From food service to custodial to maintenance. People who take pride in their work and intend to do a good job. People who want to be part of something bigger than themselves. (1) • You can't pigeon-hole adults. You need to empower people and get out of their way. Give them the opportunity to be risk-takers. To take chances. To think for themselves. They need to grow as well. You can't stifle adults. (1) • I think the thing that probably makes schools successful is to have a strong teaching staff that cares about students. You want a staff that's open to developing themselves professionally and open to accepting new ideas but yet being very prudent and drawing on their own experience. (2) • I think it's the people who make schools successful. I think it's the teachers and the leadership and the way they handle situations and they way that they guild relationships and teach the children. (3)
Maintains coherent focus		X	X	• Some people like you (referring to the lead researcher) have the ability to step back and look at things more objectively than others. There were principals in Bird ISD that were equity minded to a point but they were not as aware at the time. You had that focus and drive and vision. (2) • That's where the kids come in. As long as you focus on them, things seem to be fine. (3)

Figure 3. Summary of Participants' Responses by Theme

Additional characteristics. Our analysis of the data revealed several additional characteristics that should be added to the Skrla et al. (2009) EOCA characteristics. For example, analysis of participant interviews indicated that decisiveness and good judgment were also characteristics that emerged as a theme. For example, our participants shared such comments as:

> I was willing to make the tough decisions. Stand behind the decisions.
>
> Use judgment in determining how far a school can move in one year.
>
> I think braveness and good judgment are two key attributes.

Additionally, Mr. Tyler shared that, in his view, the critical piece to a successful school was to "have a strong teaching staff that cares about students." Mr. Guzman stated it this way in response to the question, "what makes a school successful?" He said, "Adults are responsible for success. The kids are the constant variable." All of these comments substantiate the need to add decisiveness and good judgment to the list of EOCA characteristics.

Additionally, participants provided us with a number of comments related to the need for communication and collaboration. For example, Dr. Bryan said when considering the emergence of professional learning communities (Hord, 2004), she considered these to be most effective when:

> Teachers are working together. They build their lessons together. They talk about the kids together. They are moving in the same direction and have the same goals and vision for their students but they are not doing it isolated. They are doing it collaboratively.

She noted further:

> We're even moving more closely to that with our TAP or Teacher Advancement (professional development) Program. Not only do they (teachers) work in collaboration with one another, but they have a mentor.

Perhaps some would argue these attributes of collaboration and expertise at communication are already subsumed in the EOCA list, but we offer that they should be explicitly included as well.

Discussion

In 2005, a report issued by The Education Trust addressed the lack of gains made in closing achievement gaps via efforts of No Child Left Behind [NCLB] (2001). Specifically at issue are those achievement gaps where "in reading and math, for instance, both the Latino-White gap and the gap between poor and no-poor students grew or stayed the same in more states than they narrowed" (The Education Trust, p. 2). The stories reported here, from the mouths of the people who made it happen, the EOCA's involved in the successful turnaround of three rural schools during this NCLB period when others weren't being successful, are important (Labov, 1972).

Our analysis of the three selected cases overall concluded was that their equity orientation fell along a continuum. For Mr. Guzman, while he very certainly provided some of the richest data in this study, he subconsciously indicated through some of his responses his uncertainty in his current situation. At times, he almost distanced himself from some of the problems and some of the work referring to the high school in his district as "they hit bottom." However, a number of his responses and their correlation to the Skrla et al. (2009) EOCA list clearly label him as a strong EOCA. In the case of Mr. Tyler, he is probably in the middle of the continuum as compared to the other two participants having revealed some personal transformation as an EOCA to us in the course of this study. His responses were often very cautious and thought-out and occasionally he struggled to finalize an answer composing his responses over and over during the interview as if to arrive at the right words. By his own admission, he considers himself as still learning about and wrestling through his own perceptions of equity.

Finally, Dr. Bryan, who was brief and concise in her interview, works in the largest of the three districts and probably the one with the lowest accountability ratings at both state and federal levels. Out of the three participants, we feel Dr. Bryan is struggling the most in her work as an EOCA. During the interviews, while her demeanor was calm, it was evident that the demands of the job were wearing on her. However, she was nonetheless most willing to take the time to sit down with us and discuss her commitment to equity work and conversations about that work.

Over the course of our data analysis particularly as it related to the EOCA framework, we found that virtually all participants shared conversations that could be interpreted or reflected as evidence of each of these characteristics. Each participant provided data that fell into at least five of the seven categories. Their responses either provided information about themselves as EOCA's or of another person as an EOCA. Additionally, analysis of the data revealed that decisiveness and judgment as well as communication and collaboration and the ability to "give credit away," as Mr. Tyler did, were strongly evidenced as characteristics that should be added to the EOCA list. In a previous book on equity, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) noted that giving credit away was a significant attribute for effective leadership. Thus, if we could add to this list of EOCA characteristics by Skrla et al. (2009), we would likely include "giving credit away" as an equity attribute. When one considers the very act of giving something away, it is done so that all have equal or equitable credit.

Finally, what is unique about the participants in this study is that each works in a small, rural school district. One of the key themes that emerged was a recurring reference to size of the districts and/or size of other professional situations these superintendents had worked in that were also small, and successful. Although Skrla et al. (2009) do not note size as a criteria for creating a coherent focus, other researchers, particularly those affiliated with the construct of smaller learning communities have had an influence on success in schools by creating small learning environments. Frequently, during the lead author's work with Mr. Tyler, he noted that he had chosen in virtually all of his superintendent positions to work in small schools because those were situations where he felt confident he could have an impact. Mr. Guzman too shared how a coherent focus made his work in an alternative education setting successful in part because it was a small learning community. Likewise, his work as an assistant principal in a ninth grade learning center was also successful, as he noted, due to a small staff that was able to maintain focus on their students. Perhaps herein lies some data for future research recommendations with regard to how the small size in successful rural schools could inform educational settings aligned with extant literature on smaller learning communities (Cotton, 2001).

Final Thoughts

The nature of qualitative research is to expect the unexpected. Participants provided several unexpected and conflicting responses. As researchers, we examined our own lenses as EOCA's and worked to remain "committed but patient" and not "demonize" (Skrla et al., 2009) some of what was being heard when data conflicted with other common emergent themes. Instead, those responses were used to help understand the struggles of an EOCA or the transformative process of becoming an EOCA. In fact, in the case of two of the participants, initial interpretations of their responses lead us to consider that there is a tipping point when an equity oriented change agent's disposition emerges; that is, this sort of leadership is emergent and fluid, it ebbs and flows along a continuum between exhibiting just the right amount of leadership to push for change while also knowing when to step back and let others lead.

To end this discussion, we share one final quote from the first participant. We feel this quote is indicative of the leap of faith EOCA's are willing to take:

> When I came here, I found a school with no stability. Had no principal when I got here. Teachers were coming and going. Morale stunk. They had no direction and in five years, I think we've come a long way. I'm not happy there is still a long way to go. I'm the worst critic of our progress. I don't see it, the progress, you know. You (the lead author) and I talk. I get caught up in what we haven't done – our facilities, our

> money issues, and the subgroups still struggle. I guess my weakness is not to focus on the successes.

As researchers, we find that his and the others' persistence and constant efforts at seeking improvement are not weaknesses, but rather their greatest strengths in leading as EOCA's.

References

Bernard, H. R. (2002). Qualitative data analysis I: Text analysis. In H. R. Bernard (Ed.), *Research methods of anthropology* (pp. 440-448). Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Bruner, J. (2001). Self-making and world-making. In J. Brockmeier & D. Carbaugh (Eds.), *Narrative and identity: Studies in autobiography, self, and culture* (pp. 25-37). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Burgoyne, J. (1990). Doubts about competency. In M. Devine (Ed.) *The Photofit manager,* (pp. 20-26). Unwin-Hyman: London.

Cole, A., & Knowles, J. (2001). *Lives in context: The art of life history research.* Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Cotton, K. (2001). *New small learning communities: Findings from recent literature.* Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories.

Dulewicz, V., & Herbert, P. (2000). Predicting advancement to senior management from competencies and personality data: A seven – year follow up study. *British Journal of Management, 10*(1), 13-23.

DuPlessis, R. (1985). *Writing beyond the ending: Narrative strategies of twentieth-century women writers.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Education Trust. (2006). *Yes we can. Telling truths and dispelling myths about race and education in America.* Washington, DC: Author.

Elmore, R. (1996). Getting to scale with good educational practice. *Harvard Education Review, 66*(1), 1–24.

Erlandson, D., Harris, E., Skipper, B., & Allen, S. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. (1994). Coordinating bottom-up and top-down strategies for education reform. In R. Elmore & S. Fuhrman (Eds.), *The governance of curriculum* (pp. 186–202). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory; Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing.

Grogan, M. (2002a). Leadership for social justice. [Special issue]. *Journal of School Leadership, 12*(2).

Grogan, M. (2002b). Leadership for social justice, part II. [Special issue]. *Journal of School Leadership, 12*(3).

Hord, S. M. (2004). Professional learning communities: An overview. In S. M. Hord (Ed.), *Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities* (pp. 5-14). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Howell, J. M. & Higgins, C. A. (1990). Champions of change: Identifying, understanding and supporting champions of technological innovation, *Organizational Dynamics 19*(1), 40-57.

Houston, P., Blankenstein, A., & Cole, R. (2007). *Spirituality in educational leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Howley, C. (2004). *Ten precepts about the circumstance of rural education*. Retrieved from the ERIC database. (ED491047)

Johnson, J., & Strange, M. (2009). *Why rural matters 2009: State and regional challenges and opportunities*. Arlington, VA: Rural School and Community Trust.

Khattri, N., Riley, K., & Kane, M. (1997). Students at risk in poor, rural areas: A review of the research. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13*(2), 79-100. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/v13,n2,p79-100,Khattri.pdf

Kilpatrick, S. A., & Locke, E. A. (1991). Leadership: Do traits matter? *Academy of Management Executive, 5*(2), 48-60.

Labov, W. (1972). The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In *Language in the inner city,* (pp. 354-396). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Marshall, C. (2004). Social justice challenges to educational administration: Introduction to a special issue. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 5-15.

Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher, 17*(2), 13-17.

Maxwell, G., Huggins, K., & Scheurich, J. (2010). How one historically underperforming rural and highly diverse high school achieved a successful turnaround. *Planning & Changing, 41*(3/4), 161-186.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice 31*(2), 132-140.

Normore, A. (2006). Leadership for learning in the context of social justice: An international perspective. [Special Issue] *Journal of Educational Administration, 45*(6).

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Patton, M. (2003). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Reissman, C. (1993). *Narrative analysis.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Scheurich, J. & Skrla, L. (2003). *Leadership for equity and excellence: Creating high-achievement classrooms, schools, and districts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization.* New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency.

Shoho, A. (Ed.) (2006). The role of social justice in educational administration programs [Special Issue]. *Journal of Education Administration.*

Singleton, G., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Skrla, L., McKenzie, K., & Scheurich, J. (2009). *Using equity audits to create equitable and excellent schools.* Corwin Press.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Theoharris, G. (2009). *The school leaders our children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice and school reform.* Teachers College Press: NY, 13.

Theoharris, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(2) 228-251.

Tillman, L., Brown, K., Campbell Jones, F., & Gonzalez, M. (Eds.). (2006). Teaching for transformative leadership for social justice [Special issue]. *Journal of School Leadership, 16(*2).

Valencia, R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice.* New York, NY: Routledge Farmer.
Texas Education Agency Snapshot. Retrieved September 12, 2011.
USDE (2012). *A wake-up call to education.* Weekly online newsletter March 10th.

Appendix

Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me a little about your professional experience?
2. What do think makes schools successful?
3. Have you worked in an educational situation where you were able to move a school from being its current level of success to a higher level of success?
4. How do you define equity?
5. What would you say are the characteristics of an equity oriented change agent that you have not already described?
6. Would you say you have an equity oriented approach to education in public schools? If so, please explain.
7. Are there any other people with whom you have worked that have an equity oriented approach to education? If so, please explain.
8. How would you define professional learning community (PLC)?
9. Have you ever worked in an educational setting where a PLC emerged either intentionally or informally? If so, please explain.
10. Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

Author Note

Gerri M. Maxwell is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling at Texas A&M–Kingsville, received her Ph.D. from Texas A&M–College Station in 2004. She has worked as an educator for thirty plus years in roles as classroom teacher, district level administrator, and university faculty member garnering millions of dollars in grant funding at both universities and high-needs public schools to support initiatives targeting those schools. Her research interests include leadership, school reform, professional learning communities, and qualitative research methodologies. She was an American Educational Research Association David L. Clark Seminar Scholar in 2004. She may be contacted at Texas A&M University – Kingsville, MSC 223, 138 Rhode Hall, 700 University Blvd., Kingsville, Texas 78363-8202; Cell: 979 451 3001; Fax: 361 593 2136; Email: kugmm001@tamuk.edu.

Leslie A. Locke is a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and School Counseling at The University of Southern Mississippi. She received her Ph.D. from Texas A&M-College Station in 2011. She has worked as an educator for 15 years in various teaching and administrative roles. Her research interests include educational leadership for social justice, equity, and schooling for historically underserved student groups. She may be contacted at Leslie.Locke@usm.edu.

James Joseph "Jim" Scheurich is a Professor at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and Coordinator of the Urban Education Studies program at IUPUI. His research interests include equity in education, schools that are successful with diverse students, race and racism, and qualitative research methodologies. He may be contacted at jscheuri@iupui.edu.

Copyright 2013: Gerri M. Maxwell, Leslie A. Locke, James Joseph Scheurich, and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Maxwell, G. M., Locke, L. A., & Scheurich, J. J. (2013). Case study of three rural Texas superintendents as equity oriented change agents. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(Art. 22), 1-23. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/maxwell22.pdf